AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims replaces all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (Currently Amended) At a computer system configured to manage an online chat session between a plurality of members of a group of chat participants, the group including a plurality of computer users, a ~~A~~ computer implemented method for including a software resource as a member of the group of chat participant~~s~~ within ~~an~~ the online chat session conducted through a messaging service, comprising the steps of:

    (a)   registering the software resource to indicate that it is available to participate in an online chat session, when said software resource is executed;

    (b)   including the software resource, along with the plurality of computer users, as members in a group of online chat participants, each member in the group of chat participants, including the software resource, capable of sending a plain language message to all the other members in the group of chat participants, including the software resource ~~enabling a user who is participating in the online chat session to include the software resource within a list of participants in the online chat session, the software resource then being available to the user as a participant in the chat session in which the user is also participating~~;

    (c)   receiving from a member of the group of chat participants a submission of a plain language message ~~enabling the users to enter a plain language message within an online chat session user interface~~;

    (d)   transmitting the plain language message to ~~the~~ each member of the group of online chat participants, including the software resource ;

    (e)   the software resource parsing the plain language message ~~received by the software resource~~;

    (f)   the software resource determining a plain language response to the message; and

    (g)   the software resource transmitting the plain language response ~~from the software resource~~ back to all of the members of the group of chat participants, including the member that submitted the plain language message and including at least one other member that did not submit the plain language message ~~the user~~, thus enabling each member of the group of chat

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participants ~~the user~~ to <u>equally</u> interact with the software resource as another participant in the online chat session, by responding to the plain language message ~~that was entered by the user~~.

2. (Original) The method of Claim 1, further comprising the step of enabling the user to selectively direct the message to the software resource.

3. (Currently Amended) The method of Claim 1, <u>wherein one or more of the plurality of computer users answers the plain language message</u> sent to the software resource ~~further comprising the step of enabling the user to selectively add another person as a participant in the online chat session, said other person also receiving the plain language response from the software resource~~.

4. (Original) The method of Claim 1, wherein, if the software resource is unable to determine a plain language response to the plain language message, the response is one of a nil response and an indication that a response cannot be provided .

5. (Original) The method of Claim 1, further comprising the step of providing a graphic indication that the software resource is online and available to participate in the online chat session as a participant.

6. (Original) The method of Claim 1, wherein the plain language message comprises a query, and the plain language response comprises data responsive to the query.

7. (Currently Amended) The method of Claim ~~1~~<u>3</u>, wherein<u> the user that submitted the message receives multiple responses to the message including responses from the software resource and one or more of the plurality of computer users</u>, ~~for the user, the online chat session is implemented by a messaging service program~~.

8. (Original) The method of Claim 1, wherein the step of registering comprises the step of registering with a messaging service server through which the messaging service is implemented

for all participants in the online chat session, including the software resource.

9. (Original) The method of Claim 1, wherein the step of determining the plain language response includes the step of employing the software resource to search through data accessible by the software resource to find data provided in the plain language response.

10. (Previously Presented) A machine readable medium having processor-executable machine instructions for performing steps (b) - (d) as recited in Claim 1.

11. (Previously Presented) A machine readable medium_having processor-executable machine instructions for performing steps (a) and (e) - (g) as recited in Claim 1.

12. (Currently Amended) A method for accessing information available through a software resource during a messaging service session, comprising the steps of:

(a)   indicating ~~each~~ in a group of online chat participants in the messaging service session, the group including as members in the group a plurality of users and a software resource, at least one of the plurality of users of the messaging service session and a software resource being included as participants in the messaging service session;

(b)   enabling any of the plurality of ~~a~~ users to enter a plain language query in the messaging service session;

(c)   transmitting the plain language query to each member of the group of online chat participants, including the software resource;

(d)   the software resource parsing the plain language query ~~at the software resource~~;

(e)   the software resource automatically determining information responsive to the software plain language query~~, using the software resource~~; and

(f)   transmitting the information responsive to the plain language query back to all of the members of the group of chat participants, including the member that submitted the plain language message and including at least one other member that did not submit the plain language message ~~the user~~, thus enabling each member of the group of chat participants ~~the user~~ to equally access information through the software resource, wherein the software resource acts as a participant in the messaging service session by responding to the plain language query entered by any of the plurality of ~~the~~ users.

13. (Original) The method of Claim 12, wherein the software resource and all other participants in the messaging service session are coupled in communication over a network.

14. (Original) The method of Claim 12, further comprising the step of enabling the user to selectively add the software resource to the messaging service session from a list of prospective participants.

15. (Original) The method of Claim 12, further comprising the step of enabling the user to selectively direct the plain language query to the software resource.

16. (Original) The method of Claim 12, wherein the software resource comprises a data manager program that accesses a store of data to find the information responsive to the plain language query transmitted from the user.

17. (Original) The method of Claim 12, further comprising the step of transmitting an indication from the software resource to the user that information responsive to the plain language query could not be provided.

18. (Original) The method of Claim 12, further comprising the step of providing an indication to a user when the software resource is unavailable to participate in a messaging service session.

19. (Original) The method of Claim 12, wherein the information provided by the software resource includes a network address at which data responsive to the query are located.

20. (Original) The method of Claim 12, wherein a plurality of software resources are included in a list of prospective participants in the messaging service session.

21. (Currently Amended) A system for enabling a software resource to respond as a conventional participant in a messaging service session implemented over a network, comprising:

(a)   a messaging service server coupled to the network and programmed for implementing registration of prospective instant message participants available to be added to a messaging service session as participants;

(b)   a user computing device coupled to the network and including a processor programmed to:

(i)   execute a messaging service session in which members of a group of online chat participants including a plurality of users is a are participant participating;

(ii)   add a software resource as a member of the group of online chat participants in the messaging service session; and

(iii)   enable any of the plurality of a users to enter a plain language query for information to be obtained from the software resource within the messaging service session; and

(c)   a software resource computing device coupled to the network and programmed to:

(i)   execute the software resource;

(ii)   register the software resource with the messaging service server when the software resource is available to participate in a messaging service session as a participant;

(iii)   parse a plain language query received from one of the plurality of the users during the messaging service session;

(iv)   access data with the software resource to find information responsive to the plain language query; and

(v)   transmit said information to all of the members of the group of chat participants, including the user computing device that submitted the plain language message and including at least one other member that did not submit the plain language message over the network, thus enabling the user each member of the group of chat participants to equally interact with the software resource as another participant in the online chat session, by enabling the software resource to respond to the plain language query entered by the user.

22. (Original) The system of Claim 21, wherein the software resource computing device includes a data store from which the information is derived to respond to the plain language query received during the messaging service session.

23. (Original) The system of Claim 21, wherein the user computing device includes a user interface that enables a user to enter the plain language query into the messaging service session.

24. (Original) The system of Claim 21, wherein the user computing device includes a display on which the messaging service session is viewed, an image viewable during said messaging service session including an indication of whether the software resource is available to participate in the messaging service session.

25. (Original) The system of Claim 21, wherein the user computer device is programmed to enable a user to selectively add the software resource as a participant in the messaging service session.

26. (Currently Amended) Apparatus that ~~enables a user to interact with~~ includes a software resource as a member of a group of chat participants within an online chat session ~~during~~ conducted through a messaging service ~~session~~, comprising:

(a)   a network interface that connects to a network over which the messaging service session is communicated;

(b)   a display;

(c)   a user input device;

(d)   a memory in which a plurality of machine instructions are stored; and

(e)   a processor coupled to the network interface, the display, the user input device, and the memory, said processor executing the machine instructions, causing the processor to carry out a plurality of functions, including:

(i)   registering the software resource to indicate that it is available to participate in an online chat session, when said software resource is executed ~~a user with a messaging service as being available to participate in a messaging service session as a participant~~;

(ii)   including the software resource, along with the plurality of computer users, as members in a group of online chat participants, each member in the group of chat participants, including the software resource, capable of sending a plain language message to all the other members in the group of chat participants, including the software resource ~~enabling a user to add one or more participants to a messaging service session, at least one participant that is added comprising a software resource that is registered as being available to participate in the messaging service session as a participant~~;

(iii)   receiving from a member of the group of chat participants a submission of a plain language message ~~enabling a user to enter a plain language query with the user input device~~;

(iv)   transmitting the plain language query over the network to each member of the group of online chat participants in the ~~messaging service~~ online chat session including the software resource; and

(v)   all of the members of the group of chat participants, including the member that submitted the plain language message and including at least one other member that did not submit the plain language message receiving a response over the network from ~~a~~ the software resource responding to the plain language query as a participant.

27. (Currently Amended) Apparatus that enables a software resource to interact as a participant during a messaging service session, comprising:

(a)   a network interface that connects to a network over which the messaging service session is communicated;

(b)   a memory in which a plurality of machine instructions are stored; and

(c)   a processor coupled to the network interface, and the memory, said processor executing the machine instructions, causing the processor to carry out a plurality of functions, including:

(i)   registering the software resource with a messaging service as being available to participate in a messaging service session as a <u>member of a group of online chat participant</u>s<u>, the group including as members of the group a plurality of users and the software resource</u>;

(ii)   parsing a plain language query received from ~~a~~ <u>any of the plurality of</u> user<u>s</u> during a messaging service session in which the software resource has been added as a participant <u>by one or more of the plurality of users</u>, the software resource being enabled to receive and parse the plain language query;

(iii)   finding data responsive to the plain language query; and

(iv)   transmitting the data over the network to ~~a~~ <u>all of the members of the group of chat participants, including the member that submitted the plain language message and including at least one other member that did not submit the plain language message,</u> ~~user who entered the plain language query~~ <u>thus enabling each member of the group of chat participants to equally access information through the software resource.</u>